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Since its opening in Paris in 1953, Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot has received the attention of numerous critics who have attempted to analyze this enigmatic drama. No one knows for sure what Godot is about; nevertheless, each critic who writes about the play seems passionately convinced that his interpretation is correct.

I have attempted to shed some light on critical interpretations of Waiting for Godot, which because of its complexity, can support most of the divergently contradictory interpretations written about it.

The conclusions to be drawn are that Beckett preaches neither a Christian nor Anti-Christian doctrine in Waiting for Godot, and that the play does not preach or teach anything, but instead presents a 'slice of psychic life' of twentieth century man. Godot is closer to Jung's statement that man has always had religious feelings than it is to anything else. With religious myths dead, and all his knowledge utterly useless, twentieth century man faces the void within, a void created by his need for something which science, philosophy, economics have been unable to fill.

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WAITING FOR GODOT: CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES

by

Sally Carstarphen

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Fred Chappell  
Thesis Adviser

APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis has been approved by the following  
committee of the faculty of the Graduate School at the  
University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Thesis Adviser Fred Chappell

Oral Examination  
Committee Members

Thomas J. ...  
Lee Dixon  
Alan Price

April 29, 1969  
Date of Examination

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## CHAPTER I

### VLADIMIR-ESTRAGON

Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot, opening in Paris in 1953, was hailed by the playwright, Jean Anouilh, as a "masterpiece that will cause despair for men in general and for playwrights in particular."<sup>1</sup> In addition he declared that the opening night of Waiting for Godot was as important as the opening of Pirandello's Six Characters in Search of an Author in 1923.<sup>2</sup> Since its performances in Miami and New York in 1956, the generally accepted opinion is that Godot is a classic. Ruby Cohn, in the introduction to her Casebook on Waiting for Godot, notes that according to figures, not only is the play a classic, but one which paradoxically for our time has sold well.<sup>3</sup> Martin Esslin echoes Cohn's opinion saying that Godot is a safely established contemporary classic.<sup>4</sup>

Critical position on Waiting for Godot is not so easy to define as far as a generally accepted interpretation is

<sup>1</sup>Jean Anouilh, "Godot or the Music Hall Sketch of Pascal's Pensées as Played by the Fratellini Clowns," Casebook on Waiting for Godot, ed. Ruby Cohn (New York, 1967), p. 12.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>3</sup>Ruby Cohn, Casebook on Waiting for Godot (New York, 1967), p. 7. "...Waiting for Godot has sold nearly 50,000 copies in the original French, and nearly 350,000 copies in Beckett's own English translation."

<sup>4</sup>Martin Esslin, Samuel Beckett, (Englewood Cliffs, 1965), p. 1.

concerned. It has been interpreted as Nihilistic, Anti-Nihilistic, Christian, Anti-Christian, Existential, and Non-Existential, to name the most frequently encountered divergently contradictory interpretations. Günther Anders proclaims that Vladimir and Estragon are evidence of man's inability to be nihilistic even in the face of utter hopelessness.<sup>5</sup> In contradiction to this, George Wellwarth believes that "Beckett makes Schopenhauer look like a gay optimist and Nietzsche like a devout believer."<sup>6</sup> He states further that those who see signs of Christianity or compassion in Beckett are seeing what is not there.<sup>7</sup> Christianity is precisely what G. S. Fraser does see. He says that the imagery of the play is Christian and that it "is a modern morality play, on permanent Christian themes."<sup>8</sup> Fraser must share Wellwarth's indictment with R. L. Francis and Alec Reid who see compassion--Vladimir's and Estragon's feelings for each other--as the answer the play tenders. Francis writes, "Vladimir and Estragon move from

<sup>5</sup>Günther Anders, "Being Without Time: On Beckett's Play, Waiting for Godot," Samuel Beckett, ed. Martin Esslin (Englewood Cliffs, 1965), p. 144.

<sup>6</sup>George E. Wellwarth, The Theatre of Protest and Paradox (New York, 1964), p. 41.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 51.

<sup>8</sup>G. S. Fraser, "Waiting for Godot," Casebook on Waiting for Godot, ed. Ruby Cohn (New York, 1967), pp. 133-34.



a self-centered preoccupation toward an acknowledgment of the self's commitment to a community of other selves and its limits and responsibilities,"<sup>9</sup> while Reid concludes that what we see in the play is not nihilism, but profound humanity.<sup>10</sup>

On the side of those who see Godot as an exponent of existential philosophy is Catherine Hughes, who says that Beckett is not too original in thought because he echoes Camus and Sartre "ad nauseum."<sup>11</sup> Edith Kern and Wellwarth refute her statement; Kern claims that Beckett's existentialism is Heideggerian, not Sartrean,<sup>12</sup> while Wellwarth negates Beckett's adherence to the philosophy of Camus because he says Beckett does not accept Being in any form as better than non-being.<sup>13</sup>

These critical opinions, exemplary of the current views of Waiting for Godot, point up the complexity of a play

<sup>9</sup>Richard Lee Francis, "Beckett's Metaphysical Tragic-comedy," Modern Drama, III (December, 1965), 264.

<sup>10</sup>Alec Reid, "Beckett and the Drama of Unknowing," Drama Survey, II (October, 1962), 137.

<sup>11</sup>Catherine Hughes, "Beckett and the Game of Life," The Catholic World, CLXXXV (June, 1962), 163.

<sup>12</sup>Edith Kern, "Drama Stripped for Inaction: Beckett's Godot," Yale French Studies, XVIII (Winter, 1954-55), 47. She writes, "Unlike Sartre, Beckett's characters are never 'on situation'....They do not play a part either in good faith or in bad."

<sup>13</sup>G. E. Wellwarth, "Life in the Void: Samuel Beckett," University of Kansas City Review, XXVII (Autumn, 1961), 33.



which can support most of them. Most, not all, because many of those writers who use the terms, nihilism and existentialism, fail either to define precisely what they mean, or in some cases, to support their conclusions textually.

I do not propose to offer any final solution to the meaning of Waiting for Godot. My purpose will be to examine critical interpretations of the Vladimir-Estragon pair, the Pozzo-Lucky pair, and the theme of the play. I will show that none of the critics have distinguished between Vladimir and Estragon as far as mythic heritage is concerned, though all feel that they stand for all men. Critics fail to show that because Vladimir acts within the Christian myth, and Estragon within the pagan, they stand specifically for all men whose heritage is that of western civilization, and whose mythic heritages consequently are dead.

Though Pozzo-Lucky cannot be reduced to one interpretation, Pozzo may be interpreted as a symbol for economics which has subjugated art and Philosophy, for which Lucky stands. As such, they become statements of part of the reason Vladimir and Estragon find themselves on a darkling plain. Lucky provides in his tirade, which most critics dismiss as gibberish, the remainder of the reason man finds himself void within. To the failure of art, philosophy, and economics, Lucky adds the failure of scientific thought--despite scientific advances, man "wastes and pines." This is the key to the play.

Waiting for Godot is a 'slice of psychic life' of twentieth century man. It simply presents what is, not what ought to be. This is why the play is frightening to most; this is why it is misunderstood. It seems that man has never been able to face what he is, and twentieth century man is even less able to do so, because his scientific knowledge, which he so prizes, has ironically led to the regression of his human understanding, adding nothing to his contentment. He cannot understand why he fails to find an identity; why his life is meaningless; why he hurts. The fault is within, but he will continue to 'blame on his boots the fault of his feet,' i.e., to blame on externals the fault of the internal.

Godot is closer to a Jungian statement than to anything else.<sup>14</sup> It is an inevitable sequence to Arnold's nineteenth century vision of man's beginning life on a darkling plain, and to Yeats's subsequent question, "And what rough beast, its hour come round at last, / Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?"<sup>15</sup> Vladimir and Estragon wait on that darkling plain, and Mr. Godot, who may or may not

<sup>14</sup>C. G. Jung, Modern Man in Search of a Soul (New York, 1933), p. 140. ".... The human psyche from time immemorial has been shot through with religious feeling and ideas. Whoever cannot see this aspect of the human psyche is blind...." It is interesting to note that Pozzo does not see it -- he is blind to this figuratively in Act I, and literally blind in Act II when he has ironically gained some insight into human existence, though he is still blind to this aspect of the human psyche.

<sup>15</sup>W. B. Yeats, "The Second Coming," Selected Poems and Two Plays of William Butler Yeats, ed. M. L. Rosenthal (New York, 1962), p. 91.

come, is not God--he is something like Him--that "rough beast" for whom we wait because there is nothing else to fill the void our need creates.

Probably the most inane interpretation of Vladimir and Estragon is Bernard Dukore's psychological interpretation of their nicknames, Didi and Gogo. It is forced and offers absolutely no help in understanding the drama, for many have already remarked that the couple is reminiscent of the medieval debate. Vladimir is more the intellectual, while Estragon is concerned primarily with the sensual. Dukore writes that Didi's name written backward is "id."<sup>16</sup> True, but why consider it backward? He says Gogo is "ego."<sup>17</sup> Dukore must perform some fancy footwork here because it is obvious in the play that Vladimir [Didi] is not driven by the pleasure principle. He is the realist; he knows he is waiting and keeps waking his escapist-poet friend, Gogo, who obviously is dominated by the id. But Dukore says they are dependent on each other to make a whole being; therefore Gogo lacks a well developed ego, having an overdeveloped id, and the reverse is true of Didi, who needs an id like Gogo to make him whole. A much more logical inter-

<sup>16</sup> Bernard Dukore, "Gogo, Didi, and the Absent Godot," Drama Survey, I (Winter, 1962), 303.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

pretation of their nicknames is apparent. The repetition of one syllable from their names parallels the repetition of lines, words, and action of the drama. Everything is repeated endlessly. Like Vladimir's song in Act II, their nicknames echo in the void one sound--over; thus their names parallel the circular pattern of the play.

More apparent than Dukore's psychological gymnastics is that the repeated syllables each of their names is composed of, Go and Di, put together, is an echo of Godot. In fact, Pozzo comes close to calling Godot Godi, when he asks what the man's name is again--Godet? Godin?<sup>18</sup> Eva Metman, who, like Dukore, takes a psychological approach to the play, says Vladimir and Estragon's calling each other childish nicknames is a means of easing their frustrating situation and resentments.<sup>19</sup> She says that their relationship is symbiotic--that they are like an old married couple who wish to separate but never do.

Vladimir: I didn't get up in the night, not once!  
 Estragon: (sadly). You see, you do better when I am not there.  
 Vladimir: I missed you...and at the same time I was happy. Isn't that a queer thing?...  
 Estragon: And now?

<sup>18</sup>Samuel Beckett, Waiting for Godot (New York, 1954), p. 19. This is the text to which I will refer throughout the paper.

<sup>19</sup> Eva Metman, "Reflections on Samuel Beckett's Plays," Journal of Analytic Psychology, V (January, 1960), 45.

Vladimir: Now?....(joyous). There you are again...  
 (indifferently.) There we are again...  
 (gloomy.) There I am again.  
 Estragon: You see, you feel worse when I'm with you.  
 I feel better alone too.  
 Vladimir: (piqued). Then why do you come crawling  
 back?  
 Estragon: I don't know.<sup>20</sup>

Miss Metman fails to note that although Estragon threatens to leave several times during the play, he does not, and it is evident that he is more physically dependent on Vladimir than vice versa. Vladimir feeds Estragon and covers him while he sleeps. Their relationship is not one of love--human concern--for they vacillate between love and hate. The reason they stay together is not only mutual dependence, but fear of being alone. The paradox which Vladimir reveals here is that being with Estragon makes him more aware he is alone. Note that he says, joyously, there you are, indifferently, there we are, and gloomily, there I am. The thought of Estragon throws him finally back on himself. How can human relationships be made more explicitly meaningless? The fact that being together is being alone is distressingly evident in most of their attempts at conversation. It is to themselves that they talk, as in this passage in which they describe their own dead voices.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid. Miss Metman has misquoted twice in these lines. Corrected, Estragon says, "...you piss better..." and Vladimir is vexed, not 'piqued.' (Beckett, p. 38.)

Estragon: All the dead voices.  
 Vladimir: They make a noise like wings.  
 Estragon: Like leaves.  
 Vladimir: Like sand.  
 Estragon: Like leaves.<sup>21</sup>

Miss Metman says that Vladimir and Estragon are like what the French call clochards, people who have known better times and who were once cultured and educated.<sup>22</sup> She recalls Vladimir's speech at the beginning of the play when, in speaking of a suicide jump from the Eiffel tower, he says they should have thought of it in the nineties when they were respectable. Now, he says, they wouldn't even be allowed up. What she fails to say is that Vladimir and Estragon are clochards spiritually--their spirits, their souls, knew better times. Vladimir and Estragon are dressed as bums simply because this is externally what they are internally. The desert landscape--a plain with a tree--also mirrors externally the void within them. Certainly Vladimir lets us know in the beginning of the play that what is the matter with man is inside, though he will blame externals, "Here's man all over for you, blaming on his boots the faults of his feet."<sup>23</sup>

<sup>21</sup>Beckett, p. 40.

<sup>22</sup>Metman, p. 44.

<sup>23</sup>Beckett, p. 8.



Edith Kern and Jerome Ashmore both say that Vladimir and Estragon represent all humanity, but they do not say how, nor do they distinguish between them.<sup>24</sup> In fact, Kern says they are not clearly drawn individuals.<sup>25</sup> It is apparent that there are many characteristic differences between them which will be shown. One is that Estragon is an escapist, while Vladimir is clearly willing to face life, i.e., to wait. Still, neither Kern nor Ashmore commit as many errors as Horace Gregory and Kenneth Hamilton do.

Gregory says in his critical interpretation that "Gogo's memory, defective, fractional, has hold only on the fact that he is waiting....Gogo's one positive gesture out of the 'Nays' that surround him is the strength to wait....They reject suicide; the power to wait preserves them."<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup>Kern, p. 43. Jerome Ashmore, "Philosophical Aspects of Godot," Symposium, XVI (Winter, 1962), 296. Ashmore says that "the drama does not occur at any particular time or place, which is to say it occurs at all times and all places. Likewise, the characters are symbols of men living anywhere at any time." Ashmore agrees with Kern when she calls them (Vladimir and Estragon) indistinguishable. "The two characters are essentially interchangeable.... A and B would serve as well for... them as their actual names...." p. 305 (Ashmore).

<sup>25</sup>Kern, p. 43. "There is...little difference between the two.... One has the impression that Beckett thought of them as he thought of the A and B...in his novel Molloy."

<sup>26</sup>Horace Gregory, "Beckett's Dying Gladiators," Commonweal, LXVII (October, 1956), 91-92.

Unfortunately, Mr. Gregory has not read the play carefully, for Estragon never remembers for what he is waiting. It is Vladimir who reminds him the seven times in the play when Estragon suggests they leave. In Act I three times the pattern of this dialogue is repeated.

Estragon: Charming spot.  
 Inspiring prospects.  
 Let's go.  
 Vladimir: We can't.  
 Estragon: Why not?  
 Vladimir: We're waiting for Godot.<sup>27</sup>

The second time, Estragon has forgotten who the "he" is for whom they wait.

Vladimir: Let's wait and see what he says.  
 Estragon: Who?  
 Vladimir: Godot.<sup>28</sup>

In Act II four times not only the pattern, but precisely the same words occur each time.<sup>29</sup>

Estragon: Let's go.  
 Vladimir: We can't.  
 Estragon: Why not?  
 Vladimir: We're waiting for Godot.

Furthermore, Mr. Gregory is wrong about Gogo's positive

<sup>27</sup>Beckett, p. 10.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., pp. 44, 45, 50, 59.

gesture, since each time suicide is suggested--at the beginning of the play, and at the end, it is Estragon who brings it up, "What about hanging ourselves?"<sup>30</sup> The end of the play brings us full circle, as Estragon suggests on the last page,

Estragon: Why don't we hang ourselves?

I can't go on like this.  
Vladimir: That's what you think.<sup>31</sup>

Clearly Mr. Gregory has not made a distinction between Vladimir who does not suggest suicide, does not forget he is waiting for whom he is waiting for, and Estragon who does suggest it, does forget his appointment with Godot, and who escapes throughout the play whenever he can by sleeping on his "mound."

Vladimir: All right. (Estragon sits down on the mound...Estragon falls asleep.) Gogo! ---Gogo!---GOGO! Estragon wakes with a start.

Estragon: (restored to the horror of his situation) I was asleep! (despairingly) Why will you never let me sleep?<sup>32</sup>

In sleep, Estragon does achieve a demi-death, and his mound to which he returns again and again is a return to the womb

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 61.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 11.

of his pagan Mother-Earth. The mound's shape suggests that of the grave and womb.

Kenneth Hamilton writes that "they still think in terms applicable to Christian salvation (which they discuss."<sup>33</sup> A look at the text reveals that Estragon has never heard of the thieves crucified on the cross with Christ.

Vladimir: Did you ever read the Bible?  
 Estragon: The Bible---(He reflects.) I must have taken a look at it.  
 Vladimir: Do you remember the Gospels?

Ah, yes, the two thieves. Do you remember the story?

Estragon: No.

What's all this about?

Vladimir: The Saviour.<sup>34</sup>

It is clear from their conversation here that Estragon does not participate on the basis of knowledge of 'terms applicable to Christian salvation,' rather to the contrary, he knows nothing. Furthermore, Estragon is a poet, a pagan vocation from the classic tradition. He remembers the maps of the Holy Land--the pretty colors and the Dead Sea. Estragon, the aesthete, notices color, and the sea is inviting to him as an escape.

Twice in Act II Estragon gives further evidence of his pagan heritage. When he and Didi are calling each other

<sup>33</sup>Kenneth Hamilton, "Negative Salvation in Samuel Beckett," Queens Quarterly, LXIX (Spring, 1962), 110.

<sup>34</sup>Beckett, pp. 8-9.

names, Gogo progresses from "Vermin!" to "Morpion!" to "Curate!"<sup>35</sup> All are Latin or Greek etymologically, and the last is clearly Estragon's indictment of the clerical since it is the worst thing he can think of to call Didi. Finally, when Estragon and Vladimir have succeeded in lifting the blind Pozzo, Estragon complains, "How much longer are we to cart him around.... We are not caryatids!"<sup>36</sup> We certainly cannot deny the pagan influence on Estragon here in referring to himself and Didi as priestesses of Diana.

It seems clear that Estragon represents in his escapism those who would rather give up, and Vladimir those who even in this meaningless existence feel that there is hope of something 'to save.' Their conversation about what it is they will be saved from also points out their differences in mythic heritage and in personality.

Vladimir: Because he wouldn't save them.  
 Estragon: From hell?  
 Vladimir: Imbecile! From death.  
 Estragon: I thought you said hell.  
 Vladimir: From death, from death.<sup>37</sup>

Estragon, concerned with his physical pain and suffering, wishes to escape it, and therefore he hopes to be saved from Hades. This earth, this life, has been enough hell for him. But Vladimir is traditionally Christian in his idea

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 48.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 55.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 9.

about salvation. It is to be saved from death--to have everlasting life.

Their differences are evident also when Vladimir considers the two thieves on the cross. To him, it is a reasonable percentage--one out of two was saved,<sup>38</sup> but Estragon believes that "people are bloody ignorant apes to believe it."

We should be reminded of Vladimir and Estragon when we learn from the two boy messengers that one is a shepherd, the other a goatherd for Mr. Godot. Mr. Godot mistreats the shepherd, favoring the goatherd. This is exactly the opposite of the Christian God's action, an indication that Godot is not the Christian God.<sup>39</sup> In considering Vladimir and Estragon as representatives of two mythic heritages, we see a parallel between the goatherd and shepherd, Estragon and Vladimir. The goat was the animal sacred to Dionysus, the suffering God of pagan mythology [and also its escapist and supreme sensualist], while the shepherd is a symbol of Christ, the Lamb of God, and the suffering one of Christian mythology.

It seems clear that Kern is wrong, that Estragon and Vladimir are individuals--Vladimir an optimist-realist-intellectual-humanitarian [he is the first to feel sorry

<sup>38</sup>Luke 23: 39-43.

<sup>39</sup>Matthew 25: 32-33.



for Lucky in Act I and to offer help to Pozzo and Lucky in Act II when they fall<sup>7</sup>, and Estragon an escapist-pessimist-sceptic-sensualist.

The text seems to suggest that if Vladimir and Estragon represent humanity, they represent more specifically, men of Western civilization, whose mythic heritages have been pagan-classic and Christian, and whose heritages, consequently, are dead. Because of this they wait for something new--that 'rough beast.'

## CHAPTER II

## POZZO-LUCKY

While Vladimir and Estragon wait on their darkling plain, a strange pair, Pozzo and Lucky, move on and off the stage once in each act. Pozzo both leads and is led by his ironically named servant, Lucky, by means of a rope tied around Lucky's neck. Those who say like Estragon, nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, are proven wrong in Pozzo-Lucky.<sup>1</sup> They do come and go, and they do change physically. Their physical defects in Act II, blindness and dumbness, reflect the internal defects evidenced in Act I. Pozzo has changed more than physically. In his blindness, he has gained some insight into human life, though he still remains blind to Vladimir and Estragon's need to be saved.

This complex pair has been interpreted variously by the critics. Most obvious is the Master-Slave relationship between Pozzo and Lucky. Horace Gregory, Edith Kern, and Leone Marinello all comment on this aspect of their relationship, drawing somewhat different conclusions from it.

Gregory calls Pozzo and Lucky evidence of the destructive elements of friendship on earth, the master-slave

<sup>1</sup>Beckett, p. 27. Note Anouilh, Casebook, p. 13. He says this adequately describes the action of the drama.

complex of violent feelings.<sup>2</sup> One wonders how Mr. Gregory arrived at his conclusion that Pozzo and Lucky's relationship was ever based on that of friendship. Pozzo tells Estragon and Vladimir that Lucky once taught him the finer things in life, not because they were friends, but because Pozzo hired him.

Pozzo: But for him all my thoughts,  
all my feelings, would have  
been of common things....So  
I took a knock.<sup>3</sup>

The result of Lucky's being bought is his degeneration from a philosopher-artist to a beast of burden. Pozzo, who mistreats Lucky, reveals to us that the relationship is a sado-masochistic one.

Pozzo: ...Why he doesn't make himself comfortable?...Has he not the right to? Certainly he has. It follows that he doesn't want to....And why doesn't he want to?

He wants to impress me, so that I'll keep him.

He wants to mollify me, so that I'll give up the idea of parting with him.<sup>4</sup>

Pozzo has found himself ironically caught as slave to Lucky,

<sup>2</sup>Horace Gregory, "Beckett's Dying Gladiators," Commonweal, LXV (October, 1956), 91-92.

<sup>3</sup>Beckett, p. 22.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 21.

because Lucky has made Pozzo dependent on him, while masochistically enjoying his suffering state.

Pozzo: I can't bear it--the way he goes on--it's terrible--he must go--

He used to be so helpful.<sup>5</sup>  
and now--he's killing me.<sup>5</sup>

If being Pozzo's menial has destroyed Lucky's capacity to think, to be creator, it has at least relieved him of all uncertainty. He is removed from the kind of pain and suffering caused by uncertainty which is Vladimir's and Estragon's lot, so that his name, which seems ironic in the case of his physical circumstances, is actually descriptive in the case of his psychic circumstances, i.e., in comparison with Estragon and Vladimir's.

Leone Marinello would agree that Pozzo and Lucky's relationship is mutually destructive, based on despotism and cruelty.<sup>6</sup> He says that the rope which ties them physically to one another is also that which separates them.<sup>7</sup> Edith Kern mentions that "although they are closely tied together by a cord, they can give each other no feeling of companionship," and that in the second act, with Pozzo blind and

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., pp. 22-23.

<sup>6</sup>Leone Marinello, "Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot, Drama Critique, VI (Spring, 1963), 76.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

Lucky dumb, the relationship has become utterly meaningless.<sup>8</sup> She states that Pozzo was so starved for companionship, that he accepted the meager offering of friendship from Vladimir and Estragon more "eagerly than Estragon accepted the left-over chicken bones."<sup>9</sup> I am not sure Pozzo wanted companionship. He comes on stage a braggart, "I am Pozzo! Does that name mean nothing to you?" And as a property owner, "Here on my land?" he exclaims to Vladimir and Estragon; and as an insensitive buffoon who craves approval, not companionship. When he first sees Vladimir and Estragon, he exclaims, "Of the same species as Pozzo! Made in God's image!"<sup>10</sup> Later he decides that Vladimir and Estragon are not quite made in God's image, not quite his peers.

Pozzo: Yes, gentlemen, I cannot go for long without the society of my likes, (he puts on his glasses and looks at the two likes) even when the likeness is an imperfect one.<sup>11</sup>

His need to be the center of attention, to gain approval, even from these imperfect two is evident later.

<sup>8</sup> Edith Kern, "Drama Stripped for Inaction: Beckett's Godot," Yale French Studies, XVIII (Winter, 1954-55), 44-45.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>10</sup>Beckett, p. 15

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 16.

Pozzo: Good. Is everybody ready? Is everybody looking at me?,,,I am ready. Is everybody listening?... I don't like talking in a vacuum....

How did you find me?...Bless you, gentlemen, bless you! I have such need of encouragement!<sup>12</sup>

How ironic is his statement about not speaking in a vacuum. He not only is speaking in a vacuum, [for Vladimir and Estragon can only listen to themselves, not even to each other] but he quite obviously is speaking from a vacuum. Long ago Lucky taught him everything he knows that he considers beautiful, and he is still spouting it, although from a 'defective memory.' Need for attention is evidenced further in Act II. When Pozzo falls, calling for help, he tells Vladimir that when he and Lucky fall away from help, they just wait until they can get up themselves. So it is not so much that Pozzo needed help from Vladimir and Estragon, but that knowing they were there, he demanded their attention.

The master-slave relationship is seen symbolically by three critics--Lamont, McCoy, and Chadwick. Lamont says that "Pozzo and Lucky are at the same time human beings and aspects of the duality of God: God the master, Christ the sufferer."<sup>13</sup> She does not say what kind of men they may represent, nor what the implication of their earthly master-slave relationship might be. If Lucky is a Christ figure,

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., pp. 20, 25.

<sup>13</sup>Rosette C. Lamont, "The Metaphysical Farce: Beckett and Ionesco," French Review, XXXII (February, 1959), 326.



he is more nearly an Anti-Christ in his actions toward his fellow beings. In fact, it is not he who feels compassion for others, but Vladimir and Estragon who feel compassion for the weeping Lucky, and who for this compassion, are rewarded not with love, but with a kick in the shins.

Pozzo: Make haste, before he stops.  
(Estragon approaches Lucky and makes to wipe his eyes. Lucky kicks him violently in the shins.)<sup>14</sup>

Charles McCoy would agree that the difference between Lucky and Christ leave the matter in doubt.<sup>15</sup> This is after he has pointed out that Lucky suffers and is a servant wounded by another--Pozzo, who holds the rope around his neck. [He misses the similarity here between Lucky's wound, a "running sore" and Christ's wound, which likewise never heals.] What McCoy feels is striking between Lucky and Christ is Vladimir's expressing his outrage at Lucky's treatment, calling it a scandal, "just as the message of the New Testament is that the "Incarnation is a scandal."<sup>16</sup>

McCoy, in setting up the likeness between God and Pozzo says that Pozzo implies that Vladimir and Estragon

<sup>14</sup>Beckett, p. 21.

<sup>15</sup>Charles McCoy, "Waiting for Godot: A Biblical Appraisal," Florida Review, (no volume) No. 2 (Spring 1968), 63-72.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

cannot stand his presence, and that they stand before him in fear and trembling.<sup>17</sup> However, at this point, Vladimir and Estragon do not know who Pozzo is; they think that perhaps he is Godot.

Estragon: (timidly, to Pozzo), You're not Mr. Godot, Sir?<sup>18</sup>

McCoy, who does not seem too convinced of his own interpretation is in contrast to Chadwick, who confidently constructs the syllogism that Godot=God, and Pozzo=Godot; therefore Pozzo=God. Chadwick suggests that Godot=God because Beckett could not have been unaware of the "deific suggestions" of the name Godot, and he would have credited the average French playgoer with knowing enough English to know that "God" means "Dieu."<sup>19</sup> God may mean "Dieu," but Godot does not. Chadwick states that it is evident that Godot is an omnipotent being who can save them and that whether he is not merely a god, but "God in the higher sense depends on whether Vladimir and Estragon are...more than a couple of tramps."<sup>20</sup> He does not explain here explicitly what he

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Beckett, p. 15.

<sup>19</sup>C. Chadwick, "Waiting for Godot: A Logical Approach," Symposium, XIV (Winter, 1960), 252.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

means, nor who he thinks Vladimir and Estragon are. His reasoning that Pozzo=Godot is founded first on the fact that the vowel sounds in their names are identical.<sup>21</sup> He thinks he clinches his argument by pointing out that Pozzo appeared several times just when Godot was expected, that Pozzo knew what Godot meant to them, and that in the French production Pozzo had a white beard, which is what the boy tells Vladimir about Mr. Godot--that he has a white beard.<sup>22</sup> The weakest link in Chadwick's argument is that Godot is God. If this fails, the conclusion that Pozzo is God is fallacious. Chadwick builds a seemingly good argument for Pozzo's being Godot, but he does this by leaving out evidence to the contrary. The fact that the vowel sounds of Pozzo and Godot are the same, seems no more significant than Pozzo's being close to Bozzo, which Estragon mistakenly calls him.<sup>23</sup> In fact, Pozzo does later act the Clown--he enjoys performing and being the center of attention. Also Pozzo is obviously the man of property with possessions which he prizes, among them his Kapp and Peterson, and his watch.<sup>24</sup> The life of professional worries, which he claims

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 253.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 254.

<sup>23</sup>Beckett, p. 15.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., pp. 23, 30.

Lucky has saved him from, is most likely the life filled with the worries of a capitalist.<sup>25</sup> Quite in contrast to Pozzo then is Mr. Godot, who does nothing, according to the second boy messenger.<sup>26</sup> In addition the first boy denies knowing Pozzo and Lucky whose presence, he says, kept him from coming sooner due to his fear of them.

Vladimir: You were afraid of the whip?  
Boy: Yes Sir.

Vladimir: Do you know them?  
Boy: No Sir.<sup>27</sup>

Finally in answer to Chadwick, there is never a time when Vladimir and Estragon are not expecting Godot; therefore no matter who comes, he comes when they are looking for Godot.

Chadwick says, basing his argument on the idea of Pozzo's being God, that Lucky represents the greater misery of man with God than without him, while Vladimir and Estragon are illustrative of Pascal's statement that man is miserable without God.<sup>28</sup> His reasoning is obviously flawed here if we look at the evidence in the play, for Lucky is both persecuted and persecutor. As Pozzo's slave he cannot suffer the pain of uncertainty, of decision. He does what he is told;

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 59.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>28</sup>Chadwick, p. 257.

the future, the present is in Pozzo's hands. He seems far less miserable than Vladimir and Estragon who must persist in uncertainty with 'nothing to be done' to alleviate their situation.

In contrast to Chadwick is Wellwarth, who sees Pozzo as a symbol of the masters of the earth, a kind of Superman, not a transcendent being. Wellwarth says Pozzo's fall in Act II symbolizes the illusion that is inherent in even the greatest apparent earthly power.<sup>29</sup> Similar to Wellwarth is Kenneth Hamilton who writes that Pozzo is one of the fullest drawn of Beckett's characters who represents his contempt for those who trust in the world.<sup>30</sup> He also says that in the first act, Pozzo, stout and red-faced, flourishing his watch, eating, and drinking, represents "humanity preoccupied with the senses, temporal existence, and the exercise of power."<sup>31</sup> Pozzo's subsequent blindness in Act II results in the uselessness of his watch and the loss of control over his environment.<sup>32</sup> Both Hamilton and Wellwarth feel that Pozzo's failure is the failure of earthly power, of those who try to be masters on this earth. Neither mentions speci-

<sup>29</sup>G. E. Wellwarth, "Life in the Void: Samuel Beckett," University of Kansas City Review, XXVIII (Autumn, 1961), 31.

<sup>30</sup>Kenneth Hamilton, "Negative Salvation in Samuel Beckett," Queens Quarterly, LXIX (Spring, 1962), 106.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 107.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

fically what he thinks Lucky symbolizes.

Eva Metman believes that Lucky is "the destroyed contact with the creative sources of the psyche."<sup>33</sup> Certainly, this is part of it--art, which economics has subjugated and destroyed, but Lucky also stands for philosophy when Pozzo says, "But for him all my thoughts...would have been of common things...."<sup>34</sup> Metman however does not see Pozzo as a symbol for economic or earthly power, but as the "gruesome product of the modern age."<sup>35</sup> She says he represses his fear behind a facade, while he longs for those lost values which Lucky represents.<sup>36</sup>

These values, Jerome Ashmore believes, are moral values; therefore Pozzo and Lucky represent the failure of moral values.<sup>37</sup> Similarly, Daniel Chaucer writes that he takes Pozzo and Lucky to be analogous to Vladimir and Estragon, their doubles, who represent more extreme instances of moral behavior.<sup>38</sup> In answer to Ashmore, Lucky's failure would

<sup>33</sup>Eva Metman, "Reflections on Samuel Beckett's Plays," Journal of Analytic Psychology, V (January, 1960). 46.

<sup>34</sup>Beckett, p. 22.

<sup>35</sup>Metman, p. 46.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

<sup>37</sup>Jerome Ashmore, "Philosophical Aspects of Godot," Symposium, XVI (Winter, 1962), 303.

<sup>38</sup>Daniel Chaucer, "Waiting for Godot," Shenandoah, VI (Spring, 1955), 81.



seem to be not the failure of moral, but of aesthetic values--Beauty and Truth. The play it seems does not give us the failure of moral behavior, but the uselessness of it. Early in the play Vladimir acts morally in castigating Pozzo for his maltreatment of Lucky.

Vladimir: (stutteringly resolute). To treat a man--(gesture towards Lucky)--like that--I think that...it's a scandal!<sup>39</sup>

Several lines later he is accusing Lucky of crucifying Pozzo, because what seemed to be was not.

Vladimir: (to Lucky). How dare you! It's abominable! Such a good master! Crucify him like that!<sup>40</sup>

Nothing can be known, nothing is certain. How then can anything be moral, immoral?

In addition to the failure of morals, Ashmore points to Lucky as being "a representation of both a machine and what machines have done to man. In the first act he portrays not only man being used as a machine, but also a machine as a threat to its user."<sup>41</sup> Ashmore goes on to say that the same machinery which seems innocent in peacetimes, is destructive

<sup>39</sup>Beckett, p. 18.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>41</sup>Ashmore, p. 298.

in war.<sup>42</sup> Lucky is not really used as a machine--he is being used as a beast of burden, though he was hired to think, to philosophize and create. His tirade, which sounds like a broken tape is simply what has become of his thought. He can no longer think, but spouts past thoughts like a broken machine. In this, he is like a machine, a programmed computer gone awry. But the Lucky who cries over the thought of being sold, is like a man, not a machine, and he is similarly like a man when he kicks the one who would offer him compassion and wipe his tears.<sup>43</sup> Mr. Ashmore's conclusions about machines in peace and war may be true, but I do not know how it is relevant to Waiting for Godot. There is nothing in Godot that even remotely concerns machines and men in war.

What does Lucky's tirade mean? Wellwarth and Kern both see it essentially as a parody of philosophical argument and thought, with Wellwarth adding that it also parodies scientific discourse.<sup>44</sup> Kern makes no explicit statement about the implications of her interpretation, other than to say that Lucky's thinking, automaton-like, ends in the repetition of meaningless words.<sup>45</sup> Wellwarth's opinion is that

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 299.

<sup>43</sup>Mark Twain pointed out that the principal difference between a man and a dog is that if you take up a starving dog and make him prosperous, he will not bite you.

<sup>44</sup>Wellwarth, p. 27.

<sup>45</sup>Kern, p. 44.

Beckett implies here that man's increased knowledge has simply made him aware of its utter uselessness.<sup>46</sup> Another who would agree that it is a parody is Chadwick, who sees the tirade parodying not philosophical or scientific discourse, but Christian liturgy.<sup>47</sup> The implication, he believes, is that Christian liturgy for many people has become "mere ritual, devoid of all meaning."<sup>48</sup> That Christian liturgy has lost its meaning may be true, but Lucky's speech is not devoid of all meaning.

Daniel Chaucer says that Lucky's utterance is hysterical, "composed mostly of journalistic cliches."<sup>49</sup> So the jargon reminds him not of scientific, philosophical, or theological discourse, but of journalistic. He, like Kern, does not remark explicitly concerning the implications of his interpretation. He does preface his statement, however, with the remark that Lucky's speech is the "startling moment in the play."<sup>50</sup> No one could deny this. The conclusion one would draw, having made such an observation, is important, viz., that Beckett must have wanted to draw attention to what Lucky says here.

<sup>46</sup>Wellwarth, p. 27

<sup>47</sup>Chadwick, p. 259.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 257.

<sup>49</sup>Chaucer, p. 81.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

Lawrence Harvey feels that Lucky's speech is an attack on the age of Voltaire which believed in the myth of human progress.<sup>51</sup> In addition he feels the tirade is Beckett's attack on language.<sup>52</sup> I suppose he means by this that Beckett is attacking the usefulness of language, saying we fail to communicate with it. If this is what Harvey means, Lucky's tirade is certainly not the only spot in the play pointing to the failure of man to communicate. Every line spoken adds up to precisely this. Not the failure of language, but only meaninglessness, is what Eva Metman sees in Lucky's tirade, concluding that "the endless repetition of meaningless words [is] reminiscent of the 'word-salad' of schizophrenics."<sup>53</sup> Miss Metman, who is a psychologist, has most likely had experience with the disconnected language of the schizophrenic; if so, it seems remarkable that she would not note how much sense Lucky's speech makes in comparison, since everything he says is connected by the underlying theme--man's failure to give meaning to existence, no matter how much knowledge he accumulates philosophically, scientifically.

Lucky's speech, if we look at the text, contains support for what each of the critics has said, except for

<sup>51</sup>Lawrence Harvey, "Art and the Existential in En Attendant Godot," PMLA, LXXV (March, 1960), 139.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., p. 140

<sup>53</sup>Metman, p.46.

Miss Metman. It is not a meaningless schizophrenic word-salad. In addition to what the other critics have suggested, there are other points worthy of note.

Lucky begins, speaking in language suggestive of written philosophical thought. He mentions first that two men, Puncher and Wattman, have stated that a personal God, with a white beard, exists outside of time, a God who "loves us dearly with some exceptions for reasons unknown."<sup>54</sup> There is no doubt that this is the God of Voltaire's age, the age of the "personal" God. More important are the words, "for reasons unknown," which become a refrain throughout the tirade, and which echo the "nothing is certain," of the drama. It echoes also the beginning question that Vladimir raises about the two thieves. Why was one thief saved, the other damned? Why does God love man, with some exceptions? Why does only one out of the four Gospels mention that one of the thieves was saved? Why do people believe St. Luke and not the others? Nothing is certain, nothing is known; people are 'bloody ignorant apes' to believe anything. Lucky's next words about this personal God with the white beard [like Godot], is that He "suffers with those who for reasons unknown are plunged in torment, plunged in fire."<sup>55</sup>

<sup>54</sup>Beckett, p. 28. (My italics.)

<sup>55</sup>Ibid.

He reiterates the question in another way--why do some suffer and not others? It is the question that Deism could not answer. But still, there is intermittent calm in all this suffering, which is better than nothing.<sup>56</sup>

In the next section Lucky negates the notion that the social sciences, e.g., anthropology and sociology with their measurements of man, have done anything to alleviate man's suffering. In addition to the negation of social scientific knowledge we have the negation of pure science. "It has been established that man beyond doubt...that man in short... in spite of strides in alimentation and defecation wastes and pines wastes and pines...what is more for reasons unknown."<sup>57</sup> The pun on "wastes" is obvious; man's activities are here reduced to defecating and grieving. And how could the value of science be more thoroughly denounced than when it is reduced to advances in nourishment and the voiding of that in excrement?

In the next section Lucky's speech blasts the emphasis on physical culture--man's attention to the body in order to perhaps forget that he wastes and pines, "in spite of the strides of physical culture the practice of sports...

<sup>56</sup>Beckett, p. 28. In Lucky's words, "...calm so calm with a calm which even though intermittent is better than nothing."

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., p. 29.



all kinds dying flying sports."<sup>58</sup> These are the games people play, so that they won't think. What Lucky says here parallels Vladimir's and Estragon's playing at physical exercise in Act II to pass the time while they wait-- and the last exercise is breathing, the most difficult one of all--to keep living.<sup>59</sup>

In the succeeding section, another science, geology, has failed to uncover any knowledge really helpful to man-- "the air is the same and then...the earth abode of stones in the great deeps...and in the air I resume for reasons unknown in spite of the tennis the facts are there but time will tell."<sup>60</sup> Whatever science claims, does it matter to man? The earth for him has been the same since the beginning of time. Knowing that air is composed of nitrogen and oxygen, has it helped? Has it helped to relieve man's suffering?

In the last section of Lucky's tirade, the entire history of man has come to naught. Archeology may uncover the "skull in Connemara," to find that man has not progressed-- he dies the same; the skull remains the same, evidence that he dies. Like his interrupted tirade, Lucky's last word is, appropriately, "unfinished"; like also what he has said all through his speech--man is unfinished, despite "tennis..."

<sup>58</sup>Ibid.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., p. 29.

the stones...so calm...Cunard...unfinished."<sup>61</sup> Knowledge, scientific and philosophical, and the eighteenth century with its "personal" God have failed, and man 'wastes and pines' for reasons unknown.

Pozzo seems to stand for economic power and Lucky to stand for the creative and philosophical impulses in man. If this interpretation is allowed, then what they mean in the context of Godot is dependent on the implications of their relationship. One is that materialism has subjugated the "higher things" in man's life--philosophy and art. But because Lucky submitted to enslavement, philosophy and art in a sense, 'sold out.' The power of capitalism destroyed that which might have saved, in any event, that which tried to save, but as Lucky's tirade points out, could not save. Philosophy and art did become the 'beasts of burden' after the death of God, just as Lucky, symbolic of these, has become a beast of burden. In addition, science, as Lucky points out, has failed. Pozzo, blind, ineffectual, represents the failure of economics to save, although twentieth century man has seemed to place more faith in materialism than in anything else.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., p. 29. Cunard is one of those who established nothing beyond doubt. "...Cunard it is established beyond all doubt all other doubt than that which clings to the labors of men that as a result of the labors unfinished or Testew and Cunard..." (p. 28.)

Based on the above interpretation of Pozzo and Lucky and implications of their relationship, it may be said that they stand for many of the reasons man finds himself saying 'nothing to be done,' waiting for something to save him from the despair which the realization that all has failed has inevitably brought.

## CHAPTER III

## ANALYSIS OF THEMATIC ELEMENTS

What does Godot mean? In the welter of divergent critical opinion it is difficult to hold to the belief that it is not an inkblot play meaning what one wants it to mean.<sup>1</sup> Beckett must have had something in mind, and I am sure most critics feel they have discovered that something, or at least come close to it; yet interpretations are not only divergent but contradictory. Vladimir says, "in all this confusion one thing is clear"--one wishes he could make a similar statement about the meaning of Godot.

The majority of critics discussed in this paper feel that the play is a statement for humanity--that finally man has only himself and other men. The others fall into several groups: those who feel it is a statement either for or against Christianity, and those who feel it is a play, as Beckett said once, about nothing, a play presenting a completely negative view of man's condition.

Ward Hooker evades being grouped under any of the above because he takes a generic view of the play, calling it

<sup>1</sup>Leone J. Marinello, "Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot," Drama Critique, VI (Spring, 1958), 81. He writes, "Nor do we subscribe to the...notion that Beckett has written an inkblot play...."

"irony in a vacuum."<sup>2</sup> He states that Vladimir's and Estragon's dialogue, which on the surface is absurd, carries serious import, thereby setting up an ironic contrast.<sup>3</sup> He concludes that the proceedings of the play are bound to be viewed ironically, since early in the play one realizes "their [Vladimir's and Estragon's] waiting will not be rewarded."<sup>4</sup> I do not know how irony can exist when nothing is known and nothing is certain; furthermore, I think most critics would feel that Mr. Hooker could not support his statement that early in the play we know Godot is not coming. All we know is that waiting goes on endlessly; all action repeats itself, and at the end of the play, I think the audience feels exactly as Vladimir and Estragon--that maybe Godot will come, but who knows? If one does not feel this uncertainty, part of the horror of the situation is lost.

Martin Esslin writes that Godot is obviously concerned with the hope of salvation through the workings of grace, though this does not necessarily mean that it is a Christian or even a religious play.<sup>5</sup> Günther Anders says almost

<sup>2</sup>Ward Hooker, "Irony and Absurdity in the Avant-Garde Theatre," Kenyon Review, XXII (Summer, 1960), 454.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 449.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 451.

<sup>5</sup>Martin Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd (New York, 1961), p. 22.

the same, when he writes that at most the play deals with the concept of God: that Godot is not He, and therefore it is not a religious play. At most it deals with religion.<sup>6</sup> Finally Anders feels that Beckett presents man's inability to be a nihilist even in a situation of utter hopelessness.<sup>7</sup>

Anders does not explain exactly what he means by nihilist, nor does Esslin explain how the play cannot be religious if it presents hope of salvation through 'grace.' We generally reserve the prerogative of bestowing grace for a divine being. As for Anders, in the beginning of the play Vladimir asks Estragon who said "Hope deferred maketh the something sick."<sup>8</sup> This is the reason Vladimir and Estragon continue to wait--they continue to hope for something to save them. As long as hope springs eternal in the human breast, i.e., Vladimir's and Estragon's we cannot say their situation is 'hopeless.' What Anders feels about the play's dealing with the concept of God seems valid. Certainly Vladimir and Estragon are depending on someone outside themselves to save them, but Mr. Godot may or may not be a transcendent being. Vladimir gives us a clue near the end of the play that he believes at least in an omniscient

<sup>6</sup> Gunther Anders, "Being Without Time: On Beckett's Play, Waiting for Godot," in Samuel Beckett, ed. Martin Esslin (Englewood Cliffs, 1965), p. 145.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 144.

<sup>8</sup> Beckett, p. 8.



being who sees him.

Vladimir: ...at me too someone is looking,  
of me too someone is saying, He  
is sleeping, he knows nothing..  
..<sup>9</sup>

While Esslin and Anders are hesitant even to call Godot 'religious,' Leone Marinello calls it not only religious, but Christian. He feels that Godot is God; that the tree is the Cross, promise of salvation, and that Vladimir and Estragon are the saved, Pozzo and Lucky the damned.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore he says that Godot will come in the person of Christ. He says Beckett's message is that Vladimir and Estragon accept the truth of the tree as the Cross and source of salvation, because they are spiritually alive, and Pozzo and Lucky ignore the tree and what it stands for because they are spiritually dead and consequently lost.<sup>11</sup> On the evidence that Godot has a white beard, Marinello bases his conclusion that Godot is God. He claims that we know Godot must be God since Michelangelo painted God with a white beard, and this is the traditional image of the Old Testament God.<sup>12</sup> This may be true, but it is not sufficient evidence to prove that Godot is God. Mr. Godot is certainly

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 58.

<sup>10</sup>Marinello, pp. 80, 78, 75.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 81.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 80.

not like God when he prefers the goats to the sheep.<sup>13</sup> Also whenever Vladimir quotes the Bible, he is not quite sure if he is recalling correctly. The Bible is what Vladimir knew in the past; Godot may be something like the Christian God, but that God, like the Bible, is something in Vladimir's past. Lucky's tirade reiterates that this God with a white beard belonged to the era of the "personal" God, to eighteenth century Deism, also gone. Godot cannot be God; he is Godot--something undefined--for whom we wait.

The tree has traditionally been a symbol in Christian mythology for the Cross, but that Vladimir and Estragon recognize this seems unfounded, especially when Estragon is so unaware of the tree that he must have Vladimir point out to him that it has changed.

Vladimir: Look at it.  
They look at the tree.  
 Estragon: I see nothing.  
 Vladimir: But yesterday evening it was  
 all black and bare. And now  
 it's covered with leaves.  
 Estragon: Leaves?<sup>14</sup>

After their disappointment for the second time just before the end of the play, Vladimir says, "Everything's dead but the tree."<sup>15</sup> If Vladimir and Estragon are spiritually alive,

<sup>13</sup>Beckett, p. 33. See Matthew 25: 32-33.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 59.

as Mr. Marinello says, they certainly do not realize it. Vladimir, feeling his own deadness within, points to the tree, alive and in contrast to him. It is nature, with its own plan, completely indifferent to man. Earlier in the play Vladimir gave his opinion about the ability of nature to save.

Estragon: We should turn resolutely  
towards nature.  
Vladimir: We've tried that.  
Estragon: True.<sup>16</sup>

The suggestion here is that the Romantics did not have the answer either; nature cannot save man and the tree stands for proof of that in this play.

Vladimir: Quick! Behind the tree.  
Decidedly this tree will not  
have been the slightest use  
to us.<sup>17</sup>

It seems clear enough that the tree is not the means of salvation for Vladimir and Estragon. If they recognize it as the Cross, then obviously they negate the value of the Cross--decidedly it will not have been the slightest use to them. The tree, in this void, amidst the chaos and spiritual deadness of men, is nature with her order, unaffected by, and indifferent to man.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 41.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., pp. 47-48

Mr. Marinello's conclusion is absolutely unfounded on evidence in the play. There is no indication that Godot will ever come in the form of Christ. In fact, since the movement of the play is circular, a guess that waiting and disappointment will be repeated endlessly, like Vladimir's song, is more nearly founded on evidence. Since I feel that Vladimir's conversation in Christian terms is conversation of things past, the tree could not be the Cross and Godot could not be God, belonging as they do to a no longer viable myth.

Starting from an identical position, that Godot=God, Chadwick reaches a conclusion contradicting Marinello's. He writes that Godot "seems...to be a profoundly Anti-Christian play telling, allegorically, the story of mankind eternally waiting for a merciful God to bring salvation, but waiting in vain since God is a malevolent and jesting tyrant...callously indifferent to the fate of his creatures."<sup>18</sup> Comment on Chadwick's interpretation of Godot's being God, and Pozzo's being Godot, and therefore, God was made earlier in the paper. Chadwick's Anti-Christian conclusion is unfounded for the same basic reason that Marinello's is, i.e., that Godot is not the Christian God.

In contrast to Chadwick and Marinello, Eva Metman

<sup>18</sup>C. Chadwick, "Waiting for Godot: A Logical Approach," Symposium, XIV, (Winter, 1960), 257.

does not make an unequivocal statement about Godot's being for or against the Christian myth. She states that "Beckett points to the sterility of a consciousness that expects and waits for the old activity of Gods or gods."<sup>19</sup> She writes that Godot is similar to the Old Testament God not only because of the white beard, but because he irrationally prefers one boy messenger over the other, similar to God's irrational treatment of Cain and Abel, and that his 'doing nothing' is a cynical comment on man's forlorn state.<sup>20</sup> Like the others, I feel Miss Metman is wrong in assuming that Godot is the old God or gods. He may be like the old Christian God in having a white beard, but it has been pointed out that he is also different; he is something new. Man builds upon past experience; even Blakean myth retains shadows of the Christian. In somewhat similar fashion, this new 'rough beast' must have semblances to the saviour of past myth. As I have said earlier, I do not believe that Beckett is presenting any statement about what ought to be, but rather what is. Consequently, Beckett does not say one ought not to wait for Godot. Some may point to the fact that each act ends, They do not move. This would seem to suggest that perhaps this is what might save Vladimir and Estragon--action to give meaning to life, to define existence. But if

<sup>19</sup>Eva Metman, "Reflections on Samuel Beckett's Plays," Journal of Analytic Psychology, V (January, 1960), 48.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

one reads carefully, he discovers that Vladimir and Estragon have been other places.

Estragon: Do you remember the day I threw myself into the Rhone?

Vladimir: We were grape harvesting.<sup>21</sup>

Then later Vladimir mentions another place they picked grapes.

Vladimir: All the same, you can't tell me that this (gesture) bears any resemblance to...the Macon country for example....

We were there together....Picking grapes....<sup>22</sup>

They have been places, but to Estragon it's all been the same muck heap.

Estragon: Recognize! What is there to recognize? All my lousy life I've crawled about in the mud! ...Look at this muckheap! I've never stirred from it!<sup>23</sup>

Man carries the muck heap within, so he finds that no matter where he goes, it is the same. Man needs something even beyond action to define and give meaning to existence.

On this point, the failure of human action, Wellwarth agrees when he says that the uselessness of thought and the consequent pointlessness of action is a recurrent theme in

<sup>21</sup>Beckett, p. 35.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., pp. 39-40.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 39.



Beckett's work.<sup>24</sup> Wellwarth is perhaps the most adamant of those who see Waiting for Godot and Beckett's work in general, as completely negative and pessimistic. He writes that what Godot adds up to is a pessimism deeper than any ever expressed in words before and that those who see in Beckett "signs of a Christian approach or signs of compassion are simply refusing to see what is there."<sup>25</sup> Wellwarth suggests that the tree is nature in its continuing cycle; the only thing in the play that distinguishes one period from another.<sup>26</sup> Time can and does mean nothing to Vladimir and Estragon in this endless void. It would be difficult to see anything in twentieth century man to be optimistic about, so I would agree that in presenting twentieth century man as he is, Beckett would have to paint a black picture. But when Wellwarth says that Beckett holds out no hope to humanity, I disagree. Pessimism does not preclude the presence of hope--evidence Vladimir and Estragon. Beckett presents in them man's inability to cease hoping even in the forlorn and degraded state in which he finds himself. After the periods of despair when Godot does not come, and Estragon suggests sui-

<sup>24</sup>George E. Wellwarth, "Life in the Void: Samuel Beckett," University of Kansas City Review, XXVIII (Autumn, 1969), 27.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., pp. 32, 33.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 29.

cide, hope dispels utter despair so that they decide to wait until tomorrow. Vladimir and Estragon are not courageous or heroic if they wait because they hope, since man seems to have no control over hope--it is there within him, though 'deferred' at times. If this is true of all men, it is true of Beckett. He cannot state positively either that Godot will or will not come.

According to Catherine Hughes, man is a victim of his willingness to hope.<sup>27</sup> This, she says, is part of Beckett's message in Waiting for Godot; the other is that man is a victim of God and "fate."<sup>28</sup> Mrs. Hughes says man is a victim of his willingness to hope, and yet what Vladimir and Estragon present is hope as part of man's condition, not something present because of his volition.

In contrast to Wellwarth and Hughes are six critics who feel that Godot is not completely negative. At the bottom of what they say is that man does have himself and other men; this is all he has, and it either is or should be all he needs.

Richard Francis writes that Beckett says 'perhaps,' which is better than 'no,' and that Vladimir and Estragon do move from their self-centered preoccupation to an awareness

<sup>27</sup>Catherine Hughes, "Beckett and the Game of Life," The Catholic World, CLXXXV (June, 1962), 164.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

of other beings.<sup>29</sup> In saying that Vladimir and Estragon become aware of other men, Francis is referring to the episode in Act II, which is an utter farce. Everyone 'falls'; Vladimir and Estragon fall when trying to assist Pozzo and Lucky who have fallen. It is made obvious that their fall is to be taken symbolically. As far as Vladimir and Estragon's genuine human compassion and awareness of other's needs is concerned, it just simply is not true. Vladimir acknowledges the cries for help saying that at this time, at this place, they are all mankind.<sup>30</sup> But, he continues to philosophize rather than acting on what he has said, and Estragon would not help at all for humanity's sake, despite what Vladimir has said. He is interested in reward.

Pozzo: Help! I'll pay you!  
 Estragon: How much?  
 Pozzo: One hundred francs!  
 Estragon: It's not enough.<sup>31</sup>

Furthermore, Vladimir later negates his humanitarian instincts, calling Pozzo and Lucky's plight a diversion.

Vladimir: We wait. We are bored....  
 A diversion comes along  
 And what do we do? We let  
 it go to waste.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>29</sup>Richard Lee Francis, "Beckett's Megaphysical Tragic-comedy," Modern Drama, VIII (December, 1965), 265, 264.

<sup>30</sup>Beckett, p. 51.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 52.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

Along with Francis, Kenneth Rexroth thinks Godot is evidence of man's communion with man, but he carries it a bit farther saying that "only man is loyal, and kind, and brave. Only man loves. Zeus thunders like the empty sky."<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, he says the play illustrates that if we accept the world for ourselves, "the comradeship of men in work... or simply in waiting, we give life sufficient dignity and satisfaction."<sup>34</sup> If comradeship is enough for them, why do Vladimir and Estragon wait for Godot? I do not know who or what supports his statement that man is loyal, kind, brave, and loving. Vladimir and Estragon are tied invisibly by the strong rope of fear--man's fear of being alone. It is a chaotic world off-stage, full of noise, irrational violence, and pain. On stage it is a miserable void, and Vladimir and Estragon stay together, not because of love, but because each is all the other has, not all he needs. Their companionship is ironic--they really offer each other no succor; they talk, they hurt alone, though physically together.

Estragon: (feebly). Help me!  
 Vladimir: It hurts?  
 Estragon: (angrily). Hurts! He wants to know if it hurts!

<sup>33</sup>Kenneth Rexroth, "The Point is Irrelevance," The Nation, (April 14, 1956), p. 328.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

Vladimir: (angrily). No one ever suffers but  
you....I'd like to hear what you'd  
say if you had what I have.

Estragon: It hurts?

Vladimir: (angrily). He wants to know if it hurts!<sup>35</sup>

They simply echo each other here. Vladimir repeats the words Estragon used in the beginning and neither one does anything for the other, except to be there, as an echo chamber. They realize themselves that their relationship is one of love-hate when they talk of separating. Certainly the waiting has not given Vladimir and Estragon sufficient satisfaction; in fact, they do not just wait; they are waiting for something because life has offered no satisfaction. There is a void within which nothing has been able to fill. Perhaps if Vladimir and Estragon were evidence of man's ability to love, as Rexroth believes, they would have no need to wait for Godot.

Charles McCoy agrees with Rexroth in feeling that the play perhaps indicates that the only God man will find is within himself and other men. But his conclusion is that Vladimir and Estragon have not realized this so that he contradicts Rexroth. McCoy has appraised Godot from a biblical standpoint, and he believes that Godot has come, that it is Vladimir and Estragon who have failed to keep the appointment by being insensitive and loveless, expecting not to serve,



but to be served.<sup>36</sup> The Bible provides McCoy with his suggestion that God has come in the 'least of these,' Pozzo, Lucky, Vladimir, and Estragon, in Godot.<sup>37</sup> Man cannot love man. That maxim of the Christian myth--that man love--has also failed. It is the failure of myth that we see in the play. Vladimir and Estragon, Pozzo and Lucky are evidences that man cannot love man; that man is interested in self only; that man is cruel. To impose on Vladimir and Estragon, as McCoy does when he says Godot has come, edicts of the Christian myth is to miss the obvious references to this myth as remembrance of things past, and thereby to impose on them non-existent maxims. Vladimir and Estragon wait for something new because the old has failed, or more correctly, because they have failed the old, perhaps because its maxims were not possible for them to keep, being men.<sup>38</sup>

According to Kenneth Hamilton, if Vladimir and Estragon

<sup>36</sup> Charles McCoy, "Waiting for Godot: A Biblical Appraisal," Florida Review, No. 2 (Spring, 1958), 71.

<sup>37</sup> Matthew 25: 40.

<sup>38</sup> One is reminded of Dr. Moreau (H. G. Wells, The Island of Dr. Moreau) who made laws impossible for his imperfect beast people to keep without constant restraint, causing them constant frustration and suffering. Man found himself in a similar situation under the dictates of the Christian myth. The most important dictum was to love. This was the cornerstone of the Christian myth, and since it has crumbled, the whole, built around it, of necessity has crumbled also.



looked within, they would find not God, but themselves.<sup>39</sup> He says their waiting is a mistake; that to wait for something outside themselves keeps them from the realization that self-sufficiency is all that matters.<sup>40</sup> I think Mr. Hamilton is expecting from Vladimir and Estragon what Beckett seems to be saying is impossible for man. Though Vladimir and Estragon do not really care for each other, they have stuck together for sixty years because they cannot separate. Man's relationships are based on needs of self, and when others supply or do not supply satisfaction for these needs, the results are the same, a vacillation between love and hate. Clearly man cannot be self-sufficient. He requires the company of other men [as Pozzo points out--he cannot go for long without the society of his likes even though, ironically, he finds no satisfying contact psychically] and even beyond this, or maybe because of this, man needs something or someone to gratify his needs.

Opposed to Hamilton is Edith Kern who seems close to Rexroth, though not so communistic. She writes that "Beckett's characters [Vladimir and Estragon]...glorify... the all-surpassing power of human tenderness, which...turns out...to be the redeemer of man in his forlornness."<sup>41</sup>

<sup>39</sup>Kenneth Hamilton, "Negative Salvation in Samuel Beckett," Queens Quarterly, LXIX (Spring, 1962), 110.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid.

<sup>41</sup>Edith Kern, "Drama Stripped for Inaction: Beckett's Godot," Yale French Studies, XVIII (Winter, 1954-1955), 47.

Enough has been said about Vladimir and Estragon's relationship. Though Vladimir does feed Estragon, does cover him once with his coat, these instances of tenderness are not sufficient to outweigh the evidence in the play that Vladimir and Estragon do not really supply each other with love or compassion. Each is concerned with his own hurts. I think that what happens to the reader or viewer of the play is what has happened to Miss Kern, i.e., the tenderness she thinks exists between Vladimir and Estragon is a projection of the compassion, the tenderness, she feels for them in their situation.

Finally, writing for those who see the play in humanistic terms is Alec Reid who states that Vladimir and Estragon's situation is different from nihilism because they cannot say there is no Godot, no hope, no purpose; they cannot be so positive about anything.<sup>42</sup> He concludes that "we see in Godot not intellectual nihilism, but profound humanity."<sup>43</sup> It is true that Vladimir and Estragon cannot say that there is no Godot, and hope seems to be a part of them, whether they wish it or not, but it seems that they realize there is no purpose to their lives when "nothing to be done" sounds throughout the drama. The only thing they are certain of is their decision to wait for Godot;

<sup>42</sup>Alec Reid, "Beckett and the Drama of Unknowing," Drama Survey, II (October, 1962), 132.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 137.

this is the only purpose they have at the moment, and they contemplate suicide after each disappointment. Mr. Reid does not say what in the play supports his feeling that we see 'profound humanity,' whatever that is.

Jerome Ashmore combines Wellwarth's negative view with Reid's somewhat more optimistic opinion that Vladimir and Estragon cannot say there is no hope. He states that Godot is undefinable, that limiting statements are insufficient to account for all Godot might be.<sup>44</sup> Ashmore thinks that the tree as nature may be all that counts; nature did produce a green leaf, while man with all his knowledge has found ironically that all his knowledge has not removed destruction and ignorance.<sup>45</sup> Finally, he writes that though Beckett has destroyed all the old forms, i.e., traditions, deception, theologies, moral codes, leaving the way for the building of new ones, a menace lurks in the background. The new forms will not be composed by the exercise of volition, nor by other resources of man, but rather when Godot arrives.<sup>46</sup>

While McCoy used Vladimir's line, "Everything is dead but the tree," to support his statement that Vladimir and Estragon were blind to the tree, the Cross, as source of life, and were consequently dead, Ashmore uses it to support

<sup>44</sup>Jerome Ashmore, "Philosophical Aspects of Godot," Symposium, XVI (Winter, 1962), 300.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 302.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., pp. 301, 304.

his statement that nature is the only producer; man has produced nothing. This is a valid interpretation, but it does not explain the significance of the failure of the tree to conceal Vladimir and Estragon from what they feel may be hostile forces. Ashmore makes explicit his opinion that Godot stands for what will save man from the failure of knowledge, myth, and society, but he does not limit Godot to the realm of a transcendental being, though his interpretation does give Godot a positive value. Considering that Ashmore writes when Godot arrives, he implies that the question is not whether Godot will or will not come, but only when. The assumption that Godot will come is invalid; therefore, if all is dependent on him, and his coming is uncertain, the outcome for man is uncertain. The menacing reservation lurking in the background is not only that man cannot do anything without Godot, but that Godot may not come.

Waiting for Godot can support most of the critical interpretations discussed above. The weakest support is to be found for those who persist in interpreting Godot as God, and who consequently find the play a statement either for or against Christianity. Jerome Ashmore wrote that Beckett is not trying to reform, which is similar to my feelings that Waiting for Godot presents not what ought to be, but what is.<sup>47</sup>

Beckett has presented a slice of the psychic life of

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 302.

twentieth century man. Man is lost; he is in despair, because nothing has filled the void that the failure of all his endeavors and myth have left. Science tried to replace myth, and philosophy lent its aid. Economics became a demi-god, destroying creative forces along with human values. Despite all efforts, including those to care for one another, man finds himself on a darkling plain, pining for something or someone to save him. All he has, keeping him alive in his despair, is hope, which he cannot rid himself of.

Jung said once that men of all times "have been shot through with religious feelings."<sup>48</sup> I think Waiting for Godot is an exemplum for this statement. Vladimir and Estragon illustrate that twentieth century man has a need for something outside self or humanity. Men of Western civilization, after the deaths of the Christian and pagan myths, have attempted to replace them, failing utterly. Godot represents the something for which man must wait because his spirit, in despair, requires it.

In commenting on critical interpretations of Waiting for Godot, I have attempted to show that Vladimir and Estragon act within the Christian and pagan myths. I hoped to show that Godot, for whom they wait, must of necessity be someone new--not the Christian God, nor a pagan god,

<sup>48</sup>C. G. Jung, Modern Man in Search of a Soul (New York, 1933), p. 140. See Chapter one, footnote fourteen, for full quotation.



for these myths belong to the past in the history of Western civilization.

Nearly all critics agree that Vladimir and Estragon are representatives of twentieth century man, and that Beckett presents in Godot the failure of all knowledge to be of any help to man's condition.

Pozzo and Lucky are more puzzling than Vladimir and Estragon, and I believe it absolutely impossible to reduce them to one interpretation. It is possible to see Pozzo as a symbol for economics and Lucky as a symbol of philosophy and art. I have attempted to show that, based on these interpretations, they stand for part of the reasons man finds himself void within.

It seems clear that Waiting for Godot is a brutally accurate portrayal of the psychic condition of twentieth century man. Because Vladimir and Estragon 'waste and pine,' despite strides in science, and despite all kinds of philosophic thought, it is obvious they have a need which these things have failed to satisfy. I think the need is the need Jung expostulates in Modern Man in Search of a Soul. Why man has a need for religious feeling may perhaps be answered in part by Vladimir's answer to Estragon's question in the first act of Godot. He states simply that what the thief was saved from was death. Surely the myths of man have attempted to explain death, and to alleviate thereby man's fear of non-being. Man feels, and



has always felt the need for some imperishable bliss. Obviously science, philosophy, have failed to fill this need. They have failed also to give meaning to life; they have failed to make men better.

Matthew Arnold saw in his time the beginnings of the end of Christian myth, just as he said Sophocles in his time saw the beginnings of the end of Greek myth. It was inevitable that a play like Waiting for Godot would have been written in the twentieth century. Beckett stands a century after Arnold; the plain is not growing dark; it is dark. "We are waiting for Godot, or night to fall," Vladimir states. For Vladimir and Estragon, "They also serve who only stand and wait" echoes in the horror of a void in which they wait for something they can serve and be served by.

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